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## CONTEMPT

Contempt is a universal human emotion. While there are minor differences among emotion theorists and researchers, there is general consensus about the features of contempt. First, contempt is an interpersonal emotion; that is, it occurs in social situations, when people are interacting with or observing others. Second, it involves a negative evaluation of another person's behavior, which in and of itself signals one's sense of self-importance relative to others. Third, it involves feelings of moral superiority over the other person—that is, the feeling that the person is lower or unworthy. Fourth, it involves positive feelings about oneself.

Contempt is often confused with other emotions, particularly anger and disgust. Research, however, has demonstrated that contempt has its own unique facial expression—a unilateral curl and/or tightening of the lip corner, but only on one side of the face. This expression often occurs with a slight head raise and tilt, to give the appearance that one is “looking down one's nose” at the other, and/or turning away at the same time. Studies have also shown that individuals may not use the word “contempt” very frequently, and are generally not able to give a definition of it that includes the various components described above. Yet, most individuals certainly understand the situations in which it is elicited, and can reliably match the universal facial expression of contempt with those situations.

One of the functions of contempt is to create or maintain a social hierarchy. Being contemptuous of another person signifies one's judgment of the other person's social rank relative to one's own. Contempt prepares one to establish one's dominance in the hierarchy. Expressing that emotion through one's facial expressions, demeanor, or behaviors sends signals to others of one's intentions to establish hierarchical superiority. Recipients of those signals may either acquiesce, thereby conferring status to the contemptuous person, or they may prepare themselves for dominance struggles, which may set the stage for a new hierarchy.

Another function of the emotion of contempt is to validate one's self-worth. Although contempt is normally

considered by many people to be a negative emotion, in reality contempt involves positive feelings about one's own self-worth. Thus, contempt may feel good, even though the situation that elicits it may be viewed as a negative one. Indeed, it may be important for all humans to validate their feelings of self-worth in this manner from time to time.

Although there is a class of emotions that humans share with other animals, there is some evidence to suggest that contempt may be an emotion that is unique to humans. This may be because contempt involves evaluations of one's moral superiority over others. Complex cognitive abilities are required in order for this evaluation to occur, particularly the ability to know that other people are intentional agents (i.e., they do things because they are motivated to do so), and the ability to evaluate the actions of others according to agreed-upon cultural norms and mores. These cognitive abilities exist in humans, but not other animals.

Contempt has unique interpersonal effects. Because contempt signals one's moral superiority over another person, it can lead to destructive outcomes in some social relationships. For example, research on distressed married couples has shown that if contempt is expressed by one member of the couple, especially the husband, when discussing areas of major disagreement, the couple is more likely to be in trouble, report greater marital dissatisfaction, report greater periods of marital separation, and experience greater health problems.

Contempt also has important intergroup effects. It serves to differentiate ingroups from outgroups, and helps individuals to depersonalize others. The depersonalization of others makes it easier for collective violence to occur, as it gives people permission to do unto others what they would normally be restrained from doing. Political leaders in the midst of war often describe the enemy with contempt-related words and phrases, suggesting that the enemy is “beneath” members of their culture, and somehow “unworthy.” These feelings may be necessary to provoke humans to engage in collective violence against others. Thus, an analysis of contempt may play a major role in understanding intergroup conflict.

SEE ALSO *Genocide; Humiliation; Shame; Violence*

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## Content Validity

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## CONTENT VALIDITY

SEE *Validity, Statistical.*

## CONTINGENCY THEORY

SEE *Organization Theory.*

## CONTINUITY THEORIES

SEE *Stages of Development.*

## CONTRACEPTION

The Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, reinforced that all human beings have the right to “decide freely and responsibly the number and spacing and timing of their children and to have the information and means to do so, and the right to attain the highest standard of sexual and reproductive health” (para. 95). A discussion of contraception provides us with an understanding of how access to comprehensive family planning services can improve the lives of women, men, and children around the world.

*Contraception, or birth control*, is the deliberate prevention of conception by hormones, devices, surgery, or avoiding intercourse during a woman’s fertile time of the month. *Family planning* is the intentional decision on the number and spacing of children a couple will bear.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), there are approximately 123 million women, mostly in developing countries, who are not using contraception. Some of the reasons include poor access to comprehensive services, inadequate information, male partner disapproval, and fears about side effects and safety. Religious beliefs and public policies also play an important role in methods that are available to couples in both developing and developed nations.

## RELIGION AND PUBLIC POLICY

Humans have been using birth control from the earliest times. Ancient Islamic texts, Jewish writings, and Hindu sacred scriptures all mentioned that herbs could be used as temporary contraceptives. Modern religious stances vary according to their definition of the place of sex within marriage; for example, the Catholic Church prohibits any artificial means of birth control because it believes that the sole purpose of sexual intercourse is procreation. Some Christian fundamentalists, Evangelicals, and Anglicans share this view. Orthodox Judaism permits female contraceptives only for health reasons; while Conservative and Reform views leave the decision to the married couple, as does Christianity’s Eastern Orthodox Church. The Islamic faith has wide variations on attitudes toward birth control, but despite this, procreation is emphasized as religious duty. There is no prohibition to birth control in Hinduism. As noted by Kathleen O’Grady in her 1999 article “Contraception and Religion, a Short History,” the two common concerns of all major religions are fear of illicit sex and immorality, and destruction of the family. Particularly among non-Western religions, the worry is that liberal family planning policies could encourage Western modes of living, not only destroying the family, but family values as well. Some Christian fundamentalists in the United States agree with this stance. On the other hand, women’s rights activists argue that prohibiting birth control is a fundamental way to control women and keep them dependent on men.

National and international public policy also plays a role with respect to sponsoring or funding reproductive health services, and policies are modified with changes in national leadership. In the United States, for example, President George W. Bush instituted a global “gag” rule regarding abortion in 2001. This means that foreign agencies, such as the WHO, no longer receive funding if they counsel women about abortion, consequently affecting family planning programs as well.

## HISTORY OF CONTRACEPTION AND CURRENT METHODS

Despite religious decrees about contraception, there are many references that document three major methods that go as far back as ancient Greece: the use of herbal remedies as abortifacients, coitus interruptus (withdrawal of the penis from the vagina before ejaculation, hereafter referred to as *withdrawal*), and abstinence. Condoms were described as protection against sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the early sixteenth century. Rubber condoms became available in the United States in the nineteenth century along with cervical caps, diaphragms, metal pessaries, and male and female sterilization. The birth control pill revolutionized contraception with its